

# ICLife: Tools for inclusion

How to make life on a campus for higher education more inclusive.

## Tool : Doing Philosophy together with students and PID



Funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

### What's in a name

Doing philosophy is an activity in which everyone can participate. It is also an activity that brings people together. It makes you look into a mirror if it were in order to critically re-consider your own points of view. It also requires having an open mind towards other angles and approaches. Someone engaged in philosophy appreciates the intrinsic value of these other points of view. It is also an activity which gathers people around some common insights. By its very nature, it is an inclusive activity: it has the possibility to bring closer together folk from very different walks of life.

Doing philosophy can be organized in a variety of contexts. However, there are a few basic conditions in order to label the activity as philosophy. These conditions are:

- the only valid goal is the philosophical search for an answer to a philosophical question.
  - o preferentially, the group decides the theme or question to be examined instead of the chairperson. She or he can of course initially lead the conversation, but it is the group who decides whether or not they would like to discuss the suggested theme(s). If not, the chairperson will help the group to discover 'their subject'.
- there can't be any form of censorship: all questions can be asked, all thoughts may be expressed, everything can be questioned... nothing is forbidden, there is no 'political correctness'.
- the chairperson makes sure the conversation stays within 'rational' confines and arguments (see below).
- there must be some sort of shared language. The participants in the philosophical activity

must be able to understand each other, otherwise a philosophical conversation is impossible.

Doing philosophy emphasizes free thinking. This basic principle must be guaranteed at all times when initiating and monitoring philosophical activities.



### Target group

Doing philosophy really is an activity for everyone. Concretely, this means one shouldn't pay special attention to the composition of a participating group. Pre-existing knowledge is not important because the core idea is to learn from

everyone, 'each one teach one', no matter someone's background or profile.

*However*, some attention needs to be paid to the resilience and possibilities of the participants. The philosophical activity must cater to those participating (e.g. children, adolescents, persons with an intellectual or physical disability, persons coming from a particular socio-cultural background, persons in a certain context (e.g. inmates),...).

The philosophical conversation can thus be tailored to the interests, language level, conversational abilities, intellectual level of the composed group. The chairperson must at all times secure everyone's safety and make sure all are at ease in the context of the ongoing philosophical conversation.

In order to do so, the chairperson has to have a certain affinity with doing philosophy, especially in groups, as to guard the delicate equilibrium between the principle that everything can be discussed on the one hand and the respect for someone's resilience and possibilities on the other. This is not an easy task.



## What's needed?

The role of the philosophical chairperson is of quintessential importance. She or he must at all times make sure the conversation unfolds within a 'rational' framework. Concretely, this means that she/he:

- discourages the participants to speak from an emotional point of view.
- discourages the use of authoritative arguments (e.g. religion, institutions,...).
- encourages to formulate one's own thoughts and to accommodate the opinions of others.
- sees to it that people listen to each other.
- makes sure there is a healthy and encouraging conversational atmosphere.

Next to this, the chairperson must also feed the philosophical conversation. This can be done by asking open questions in order to stimulate

participants to examine their own thoughts and ideas further, to make their own answers more solid, to further develop their argumentations,...

The chairperson also makes sure he or she does not take any position and does not actively participate in the philosophical conversation. He can only feed into it discreetly.

Therefore, it is important that the philosophical chairperson is someone with a strong philosophical background (with particular experience in the Socratic dialogue).

## Budget

The budget depends on the embedding of the philosophical activity. In a school context which already hosts philosophical activities, these can be joined for free. The real cost would then be the cost of a regular teaching moment.

If this is not the case, the budget needs to take into account the philosophical chair person's fee, the logistic and the organizational costs (facilities, materials,...)

## Who gets what out of it?

*The participants* learn to organize and express their thoughts. They also learn to take on rational positions (rather than emotional or authoritative ones). Moreover, they learn to deal with other, perhaps deviating opinions and ideas. They learn to accept their own opinions and ideas being critiqued by others. All of this strengthens their critical potential and eventually leads them to cultivate an open mind. Philosophical activity does not only enhance these skills, it also feeds into a more open and critical attitude in general.

*The philosophical chairperson* gets a chance to actively make use of her or his own skills and to develop them further. She or he inevitable also learns from the conversational activity.

Philosophical activity unites people and their points of view. In the annex below an example of a common lesson plan is given in bullet points.



## Annex: Example of a lesson plan

- (1) First of all, everyone presents introduce themselves.
- (2) The chairperson explains what philosophy entails and introduces some of its core tenets: it is accessible for everyone; it is not something for 'specialists'; the only prerequisite to have meaningful philosophical discussion is to develop so-called 'rational arguments'.
- (3) Next, a current theme is introduced, e.g. 'What do you think about colonization, democracy, elections, poverty,... Do you think it is good or bad?' It is best to include some sort of visualization with this introduction, so that people with an intellectual disability can grasp the (scope of the) topic.
- (4) The participants are divided into small groups (4 to 5 persons) to discuss the proposed theme(s). Nobody is able to avoid non-rational arguments, so also PID will use these. However, this is not a problem as the aim is to have a collective meaningful search for answers to a philosophical issue.
- (5) Each group will appoint its own reporter.
- (6) The last part of the discussion is devoted to giving each other feedback when each group presents the outcomes of their discussion in a plenary workshop.